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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the settlement of Cambodian adolescents in New South Wales (Australia). It looks at their participation in education and employment, the effects the Pol Pot regime in Cambodia had on those who lived through it, and the identity problems that usually occur in young people as a result of migration. According to the 1986 Australian Bureau of Statistics Census, there were 5,898 Cambodians in New South Wales, and over a quarter were adolescents. Historical events have had a great impact on the settlement process of Cambodian immigrant youth. For example, most Cambodians arrived in Australia without having any formal education in Cambodia, and only haphazard courses in refugee camps in Thailand. When Pol Pot was in power almost all types of formal education were abolished, meaning that the average Cambodian immigrant youth is illiterate or only semi-literate in Khmer, and not accustomed to the formal learning environment. In addition, they suffer many psychological and physical consequences of political unrest and the Pol Pot regime. Students who arrive at the elementary level have better chances to succeed in education, while those who arrive as secondary students often find schooling unrewarding and frustrating. Dropping out often results in limited opportunities for employment. The circumstances of adolescent Cambodian immigrants to Australia were studied through interviews with 30 adolescents. Their experiences emphasize the consequences of educational deprivation in Cambodia and the refugee camps they were in before they came to Australia. In Australia, few schools offer instruction in English as a second language, placing another barrier in the paths of these students. Many of their difficulties in learning English may be traceable to the lack of literacy in the mother tongue and the failure to acquire early literacy skills. (Contains 2 tables and 42 references.) (SLD)

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Children of the Killing Fields: Cambodian Adolescents in New South Wales

By Chanthou Boua

Occasional Paper No. 19

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CHILDREN OF THE KILLING FIELDS: CAMBODIAN ADOLESCENTS IN NEW SOUTH WALES

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION 1

EDUCATION 1

EMPLOYMENT 4

PSYCHOLOGICAL AND IDENTITY FACTORS 6

PROFILE OF CAMBODIAN POPULATION IN NEW SOUTH WALES 9

SPECIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF CAMBODIAN REFUGEES AND ETHNICITY 11

CHAPTER TWO: THE SITUATION BEFORE AND ON ARRIVAL 16

THE INTERVIEWING 16

PARENT'S BACKGROUND 17

AGE 17

EDUCATION IN CAMBODIA 21

EDUCATION IN THE REFUGEE CAMPS 22

CHAPTER THREE: THE SETTLEMENT PROCESS 26

SCHOOLING 26
- Learning English 26
- High School 29
- Problems at High School 30
  - Racial Attitudes 30
  - Students and Teachers 31
  - Subject Matter 32
- Assistance with School Work 34
- The Financial Factor 35
- Mother-Tongue Maintenance 36
- Special Cases 38

EMPLOYMENT 41
- The Overall Situation 43

CONCLUSION 47

BIBLIOGRAPHY 52

CHILDREN OF THE KILLING FIELDS: CAMBODIAN ADOLESCENTS IN NEW SOUTH WALES

Chanthou Boua

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

The legacy of over two decades of destructive wars and of the Pol Pot regime (1975-1979) has forced many Cambodians to flee their homeland. Since 1975 about 15,000 have resettled in Australia. A substantial influx did not start until 1980. According to the 1986 census, there were 5898 Cambodian-born people living in N.S.W., concentrated mainly in the western suburbs of Sydney. Among them were many adolescents who are the target of this study. Adolescents represent a big proportion of the total Cambodian population. In N.S.W., over a quarter (25.72%) of the Cambodian population are in the 15 to 24 age group. This age group was chosen because:

- they are a group at risk
- without proper settlement assistance their contribution to Australian society will be hindered.

This study will investigate the settlement process of Cambodian adolescents in N.S.W. First it is necessary to look briefly at their participation in education and employment, the effect the Pol Pot era had on the psychology of those who lived through it, and the identity problem that usually occurs in young people as the result of migration.

To follow are my observations combined with a survey of the literature on these issues, a profile of the Cambodian population in N.S.W., and some special characteristics of Cambodian refugees.

EDUCATION

When I was a teacher in High Schools and Language Centres in Melbourne (1981-86) I observed that nearly all Cambodian students at High School dropped out of school at age 16-20 years, after having been at school and other educational institutions for 2-5 years, but before acquiring useful qualifications. Nearly everywhere they were known as low achievers, but not because they were lazy and unmotivated. In fact the students

were usually hard working and had arrived in Australia with high expectations. They wanted to succeed at school. Their parents too usually had a healthy respect for education. Having lived through four years of near total abolition of education their hunger for schooling was manifested by parents inside and outside of Cambodia. In Cambodia, in 1984, for example there were more children enroled for the first four years of schooling than in the peace time of Sihanouk's rule in 1969 (Vickery,1985;155). Identifying the factors which contribute to their eventual failure in the system is one of the purposes of this study.

What Cambodian adolescents have experienced with the Australian educational system is not exceptional. In the Report of the Greek and Italian Youth Employment Study, the authors said: "It is generally agreed that a majority of Immigrant young people from a non-English speaking background have experienced considerable difficulties in adjusting to life in Australia. These difficulties have included the acquisition of English, academic progress, satisfactory identity development and the achievement of ambitions". (Young, Cox, Daly 1983: 9). All the difficulties mentioned above are experienced by the Cambodian adolescents to a greater extent than other migrant groups, due to the traumatic experiences endured by them in their homeland prior to their departure and also to the nature of their departure, i.e. fleeing as refugees rather than migrating voluntarily. Their experiences include death in the family through assassination, starvation or disease; family separation; excessively harsh working conditions; malnutrition; lack of trust; lack of compassion, lack of health care and absence of formal education or training.

Historical events have a great impact on the settlement process of the Cambodian adolescents. For example, it is nearly universally true that a newly-arrived 15 year-old Cambodian person has never received any formal education in Cambodia but only haphazard courses in the refugee camp in Thailand. This is due to the fact that for the four years (1975 - 1979) when Pol Pot was in power, almost all types of formal education was abolished. This means that the youth is illiterate or semi-literate in Khmer. He or she is not accustomed to the basic formal learning environment, such as uncomfortably sitting on a chair for a long period of time and has a short concentration span. Sometimes he/she demonstrates learning difficulties and is unable to retain information taught.

Teachers have observed that literacy and basic education in the mother tongue is an important contribution to success in learning English and for cognitive development. I have found among Cambodian adolescents that those who are more literate in Khmer

become more proficient in English and able to grasp the new concepts faster than those who are illiterate or semi-literate in Khmer. My hypothesis therefore is that the more literate they are in Khmer the faster they will become proficient in English and learn the new concepts. Research in the area of underachievement among minority children suggests that:

> "the level of proficiency bilingual children attain in their two languages may be an important intervening variable mediating the effects of bilingualism on children's cognitive and academic development. Specifically, it has been hypothesised that there may be a threshold level of linguistic proficiency bilingual children must attain in order to avoid cognitive deficits .... If bilingual children attain only a very low level of proficiency in one or both of their languages, their long-term interaction with their academic environment through these languages, both in term of input and output, is likely to be impoverished." (Cummins, 1984:107)

Most Cambodian adolescents do not reach that threshold level of proficiency in their mother-tongue, therefore it would take them a long time, if indeed they ever manage, to become proficient in English and to strive academically, i.e. to understand the content of the subject matter taught. Illiteracy in the mother-tongue is a phenomenon that the school system here has yet to come to terms with.

A study by the Victorian Ethnic Affairs Commissions, Indo-Chinese Refugees in Victoria, noted "(i) that all settlement difficulties are compounded at the secondary school level and (2) the Khmer group appear to be facing more problems in coping with the school curriculum". (1983:74) This is no doubt due to the disrupted or minimal schooling that the Cambodians received before their arrival in Australia. It means that they have missed out on many basic concepts on which post-primary teachers base their lessons. Their task, therefore, is not only to learn the English language but to catch up with the concepts of the subject matter that children routinely acquire at primary and post primary level.

Unlike their Australian peers, the Cambodian students cannot turn to their parents or elders for help in their school work or advice about their new society. Similarly they have no background knowledge of language and are unfamiliar with many subjects taught in Australian schools.

The amount of work they have to catch up on is insurmountable. After a few years at school it becomes obvious to the students and to some teachers that the tasks of becoming proficient in English and catching up with the concepts are completely out of their reach. The situation is extremely desperate for those who arrived in Australia at an older age, i.e. senior-level High School age of around 15 - 16 years. The situation, however, is only a little bit more promising for those who arrived at junior-level High School age. As a study by the Commonwealth Department of Education called English Language Needs of Migrant and Refugee Youth said, "Language learning is not a rapid process. Hence, those students who have to learn English as well as learning content in English, having arrived as adolescents, have insufficient time to accomplish both tasks in the usual span of secondary schooling." (1986:24)

The situation is better for those who arrived in Australia at primary-level age. My hypothesis is that the younger they are when they arrived in Australia the better their chance of success in education. This is due mainly to the fact that when they arrived at a younger age (primary-level) they have more time to learn English, have access to the concepts taught at primary level, and therefore will be able to cope with the more complicated concepts at High School.

So it is usually those who arrived at secondary-level age that pose problems. Their initial enthusiasm gradually melts. Schooling then becomes frustrating and unrewarding and it is right at that point, when they reach year 10 or 11, that they decide to leave school and look for work. They are armed with very few skills and knowledge of this new society.

EMPLOYMENT

The depressed economic situation Australia has experienced since 1974 has been very unfortunate for the recently arrived non-English speaking migrant groups. During the time of economic recession migrant workers especially the newcomers, have been badly affected. Unemployment rates among migrant workers are usually higher than the national figure.

Recently with shrinking numbers of manufacturing jobs, many newcomers have been unable to find work. In 1981 the highest rates of unemployment were experienced by Vietnamese (24.7 per cent) and Lebanese (15.3 per cent) as compared with the national rates 5.3 per cent. (DIEA statistical notes (No.23) Table 1. 1981). This disproportionate

pattern continues. Migrant youth unemployment rates too have been very high and are considered "likely to get worse in the near future". (Castles, et.el. May 1986: 67)

Non-English speaking migrant workers depend heavily on unskilled and manufacturing jobs. A study by the VEAC, Indo-Chinese Refugees in Victoria, found that "... of both men and women who are employed, 77.5 per cent are employed as unskilled labourers" (VEAC 1984:64). This phenomenon is accentuated among Cambodian adolescents who have not much skill behind them and are not proficient in English.

The Indo-Chinese refugees in Victoria have a workforce participation rate of 80 per cent (VEAC, 1984:95) which reflects their readiness to establish themselves in the new country. This intention, however, is not fulfilled as competition for work is so fierce, even for unskilled work. Unemployment rates are very high, according to the above study. "Sixty five per cent of the total Cambodian male sample and 86 per cent of the Cambodian female sample were unemployed" (VEAC: 61) The study also said that the prospect of employment improves with the length of residence.

My hypothesis is that while it is not so difficult for Cambodian adolescents who have spent the last 3 - 4 years at school in Australia to find work when they left school it is worse for those who arrived in Australia at age 16 - 20 and want to join the workforce immediately. This perhaps is the result of personal contact and the degree of confidence in communication that the former group have been able to establish during their residence here.

The above study also found that for the Indo-Chinese refugees, friends and kin networks play an important role in job-seeking (VEAC: 97) The Cambodian population in N.S.W., however, is very small (5,898) compared with Vietnamese (34,000). Support from the community, therefore, is very meagre. The Cambodian community because of its small size has not been able to form a cohesive support network. Also because of the nature of their migration many Cambodian refugees are here without the kinship support that is experienced by Greeks and Italians who came to Australia under the chain migration.

Furthermore while many Vietnamese came with entrepreneurial skills, the Cambodians are usually of lower middle-level civil servant and peasant background. The Vietnamese success in business ventures (restaurants, grocery stores, etc.) means jobs for many Vietnamese adolescents who decide, for whatever reasons, not to go on with their schooling. This type of fallback is not available to Cambodian adolescents.

Lack of suitable work training is another factor that usually hinders their success in job seeking. They have usually arrived with few suitable skills for an industrial society. Language difficulties together with a low level of education ensure that they are at the bottom of the employment list, in many cases.

PSYCHOLOGICAL AND IDENTITY FACTORS

An important factor that needs investigation when studying the settlement process of Cambodian refugees is the effect the Pol Pot era had on the psychology of those who lived through it. J. D. Kinzie, a psychiatrist working with Cambodian refugees in the U.S., has suggested that Cambodian refugees "...suffered from some of the same symptoms - referred to collectively as the concentration camp syndrome - as Nazi victims." (Kinzie, 1987:333). Most of the patients who sought his treatment complained of major depressive symptoms, such as sleep disorders, insomnia, poor concentration and poor appetite. He now believes that as well as suffering from depressive disorder, most victims of Pol Pot's regime suffer from post-traumatic stress syndrome (PTSS), delayed type, i.e. the symptom were only presented one or two years after they were freed from the Pol Pot regime in 1979.

Their suffering includes exaggerated startle reaction to stimuli that reminded them of events in Cambodia, difficulty relating to their spouses or children, guilt or shame for having lived, or for having left their relatives behind, poor concentration and memory and sleep disorders. These were the most universal (ibid, pp. 334-8)

Three case studies by Kinzie were of patients 56, 27 and 48 years old. It may be hoped, therefore, that adolescents were not so badly affected by the Pol Pot experiences which took place when they were young children.

The above study, supported by earlier studies of concentration camp victims in World War II, suggested that physical trauma, tortures and malnutrition "contributed to the syndrome by weakening the victims and leaving them biologically vulnerable to the psychological trauma" (ibid., 345). It is, therefore advisable, that even though psychological complaints among Cambodian adolescents are not or not yet outstanding, it is useful for teachers and social workers to watch for their development.

A doctor of psychiatry, M Eisenbruch, in his study of Cambodian unaccompanied minors, has suggested that memories of the past "...,when powerful, interfered with the youth's capacity to concentrate on homework or other activities". (Eisenbruch, 1988a).

Teachers of Cambodian adolescents are heard to complain about Cambodian students' poor concentration, inability to memorise and day dreaming. This, of course, hinders their educational progress enormously. For the Cambodian students, complaints of frequent headache are quite common and known jokingly as "the Cambodian disease". It is also observed that some Cambodian adolescents are unable to let themselves go with joy. Perhaps they are not sure as to how far they are from the Pol Pot misery and therefore their feeling of insecurity.

Children remember the constant hunger and how they had to roam the forest for insects or roots or steal to get additional food. They also remember the price they or some of their friends had to pay when they were caught stealing. The disciplinary measures included beating, starving, forced labour and death. On top of that, many adolescents remember watching their immediate family die of starvation, disease or simply being marched away never to return.

After the Pol Pot period came the refugee camps in Thailand where they lived behind barbed wire, possessed no basic human rights, and lived off handouts from international agencies. Violent crimes such as rapes, robberies, killings are common occurrences there. For many the refugee camp was a place where they and their families lingered without purpose for years, some up to 5 - 6 years.

How could anyone return to normal living after such experiences, not to mention having to adapt to a new type of environment and culture widely different from the Cambodians'. This gap was expected to be bridged by the Cambodians, especially the Cambodian adolescents. Because unlike their older compatriots, especially those who do not have to work (pensioners, widows with young children, the unemployed workforce) and can, to some extent live a Cambodian way of life behind closed doors, adolescents are put, from the start into a situation where they must quickly adapt in order to survive. It is, as M. Einsenbruch said, in the midst of the maelstrom of acculturating to Western life that adolescents struggle to maintain core identity by reconnecting with the past, including both good and bad. It is known as nostalgia, which interrupts the concentration of adolescents and is annoying for teachers. M. Eisenbruch, however, said ..."nostalgia, however distressing, can be viewed as an appropriate response" to acculturation (ibid).

It can be explained that as adolescents are submerged in a new culture (or forced to accept a new culture) there emerges an unconscious or conscious decision to look back and analyse carefully their original identity in the way that they never did before. This is done through discussion with their peers or friends and relatives, of the same nationality, about the host society's customs, values, codes of conduct, etc. This discussion is usually in the form of comparison of the two societies. It is through this process that adolescents strengthen their core identity by asking themselves questions like "who am I?" "where do I come from?" "why am I here?" "where am I going?" "why do those children act differently from me?" Discussion with friends and family, attending traditional festivals, etc. are important contributions to successful strengthening of core identity. It is only when they have a strong core identity that they will be able to accept the new culture at its face value, i.e. not feel alienated. Programs such as mother-tongue maintenance, a study of Cambodian history, literature, music, etc. have important roles to play in consolidating the core identity and therefore, successful acculturation, which leads to meaningful contribution to a multicultural society.

In his study of Cambodian unaccompanied minors M. Eisenbruch postulated that "rapid acculturation leads to alienation because it excludes personal and cultural bereavement." (ibid). While traditional wisdom has suggested that migrants or refugees should acculturate as rapidly as possible in order to get on with their lives in the new country, Eisenbruch implied that time should be allowed initially for them to mourn their personal and cultural loss. Personal and cultural bereavement, he suggested, is healthier when done collectively. These findings, he said, challenge the wisdom of some conventional approaches to refugee settlement, and suggest that ethnic enclaves may have a place in multicultural society.

This reminds me of a short (one year) experience I had as a bilingual teacher with a pilot program for post-primary students in Melbourne. The class consisted of six recently arrived Cambodian students, a Cambodian teacher's aide and myself. The students attended full-time intensive English classes except for the five hours per week they spent with me. For these five hours we spoke Khmer all the time, except for some translation work. The lessons included history, geography, science and maths, taught, as much as possible, in Khmer. Beside the above academic instruction we also discussed the Australian way of life, our past experiences, and what happened around us. We also read a number of works of Khmer classical literature, which allowed us to look at and analyse the structure of Cambodian society, family structure and role, women's role,

king back, the classes served as therapy for collective bereavement
f Cambodians compared and contrasted the two societies, reminded
at we used to do in Cambodia and therefore consolidated our identity
ime learned new concepts in various subjects.

re mostly known to their English teachers as shy, quiet, lacking in
nostly low achievers. In our class, however, as Khmer was the means
on, the students were able to discuss subjects of substance confidently
ney did not have to worry whether they got the grammar right or the
rrect. The bilingual class is a place where students can shed frustrations
d in their English class through not being able to express themselves
xplain their experiences and feelings or ask questions. Having a place
hed their frustrations is very important for the initial period, as learning
process and students can easily be discouraged.

emarked that there was a lot of laughter to be heard out of the bilingual
lated myself as I believed that it is very important to keep them laughing
English. Unfortunately the bilingual classes ended a year later as
CMME and the School Commission were cut. In conclusion, it seems
programs such as mother-tongue maintenance, ethnic weekend classes,
uages and ethnic "ghettoes" serve as a means of collective grief for the
ure, and help migrant adolescents to build a better sense of identity and
meaningful acculturation.

CAMBODIAN POPULATION IN NEW SOUTH WALES

n the three Indo-Chinese countries, Cambodia, Vietnam and Laos fell
hands, there have been many Indo-Chinese seeking a new home in
nany Australians it is very difficult to distinguish the three peoples'
s. All of them are known as "Vietnamese" to some Australians and
are indeed a lot more Vietnamese than Cambodians or Laotians.
ne 1986 Australian Bureau of Statistics Census there are 5,898
N.S.W., as compared with 34,000 Vietnamese and 4,600 Laotians.

ations include numerous adolescents, aged between 15 and 24. They
quarter of the Indo-Chinese population, and among Cambodians a bit
cent; this is compared with 16 per cent adolescents for the general

population of N.S.W. The need for special attention to these groups of people is obvious.

Because of the nature of their migration, as political and economic refugees, the Indo-Chinese populations are very youthful. Ninety per cent of Vietnamese, 87 per cent of Laotians and 85 per cent of Cambodians are under the age of 45, as compared with 69.3 per cent for the general population. With a small community like the Cambodian one, social life has been very restricted for the few aged in the population who have little role to play and wield little influence within the community as their experience is not so relevant any more in the new setting.

One of the major legacies of Pol Pot's mass killings is the high number of lone parents among the Cambodian settlers in Australia, especially women. In N.S.W. alone there are 289 widowed Cambodian females. This represents 12.2 per cent of the female population over 15 years old (i.e. one in eight females over 15 years old is a widow) as compared with 4.6 per cent for Vietnamese and 7 per cent for Laotians.

According to the 1986 census the Employment rate among the Cambodian population of 15 years old and over is 59.1 per cent. This means the Cambodian employment rate is lower than the Vietnamese (62.88 per cent), Laotian (75.4 per cent) and the general population's rate of 89.9 per cent. The low employment rate among the Cambodians partly means that their skills are not compatible with Australian industrial society. This is largely due to the input of peasant and uneducated people, in a higher proportion among Cambodians than among Vietnamese or Lao. Cambodian women have a particularly low rate of employment. Only half (50 per cent) of them are employed. Vietnamese, Laotians and women generally have employment rates of 56.4 per cent, 72.97 per cent and 89.62 per cent respectively.

The Cambodian unemployment rate is broadly typical of newcomers. With an unemployment rate of 35.71 per cent (in 1986), it is perhaps the highest of all the ethnic groups. The unemployment rate for Vietnamese is 32.22 per cent, for Laotians 21.73 per cent, for Lebanese 28.83 per cent, as compared with the general population of 8 per cent. For the Cambodians, the situation is quite serious when we look at unemployment rates by marital status. Single people have a lower unemployment rate (25.8 per cent) than married people (40.49 per cent) who have more responsibility as far as bringing up children is concerned. The fact that single people can find jobs more easily than married people, who are generally older, means that the single (and younger) people are more suitable for the Australian labour market. It is partly due to the fact that they speak more

English as the result of their few years of education in Australia. For married people with four or more young children, the money earned from low paid unskilled work is usually not much more than their unemployment benefit. However it also means that they don't gain any work experience for the future.

Newcomers, however, have higher rates of labour force participation than the general population. The labour force participation rate among Cambodian is 66.56 per cent, among Vietnamese 71.67 per cent, among Laotians 66.95 per cent, as compared with the general population's participation rate of 59.4 per cent. This means that the rate of people willing to work, actively looking for work and depending on work for a living is higher for newcomers than for the general population. This is partly due to the youthfulness of the population.

For Cambodians, for example this means that possibly 30 per cent (100 - 66.56 = 33) of the population of 15 years and over are still at school as there are not many Cambodians living in retirement or on unearned income. If employment opportunities do not improve we can expect an even higher rate of unemployment among the Cambodians in the near future when this group decides to join the work force.

As expected, the labour force participation rate among married people (75.60 per cent) is higher than among the never married (58.51 per cent). There are many young people still at school believing that this will improve their job opportunities.

SPECIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF CAMBODIAN REFUGEES AND ETHNICITY

There are two types of migrants in Australia, those who migrated here voluntarily under peaceful circumstances, and those who fled from threatening conditions in their countries, known as refugees. The majority of migrants in Australia belong to the former group. While Australian employers rarely distinguish between the two groups, considering them merely as consumers or an additional supply of labour, several distinct features characterise the refugee group.

For most Cambodian refugees, fleeing their homeland was a necessary step they had to take, for the security and well-being of their families. They had suffered under the most brutal form of inhumanity the world has seen this century. Their sufferings began in 1969 when the U.S. started to bomb the country secretly, with the help of the U.S. base in Pine Gap, Northern Territory. When the war stopped in 1975, the misery was to be surpassed by the atrocity of the Pol Pot regime. During its four years of power (1975 -

1979) over one million Cambodians died of starvation, diseases or assassination. Also the very social and cultural fabric of Cambodian life - religion, traditions, family life, was completely destroyed. Imperialist war together with self-destructive radical revolution and ongoing regional conflict left many scars on the general population and on those who have found refuge in Australia.

Cambodian refugees in Australia came from very diverse social backgrounds. Everyone, regardless of their social status, was affected by the atrocity and the wars. Those who arrived in Australia in the early days between 1975 and 1978 included a few high-ranking civil servants who, during the war, had connection with Australia or to the war effort, and some ethnic Chinese merchants, who managed to escape first. Admission to Australia was slow as there were strict criteria. Only "approximately 2000 Khmer refugees from the Pol Pot regime had been admitted into Australia" (Kiernan , 1988) by the end of 1979. This group are the more urban and more educated members of the Khmer population in Australia now. The major influx was not until 1980, when the overthrow of the Pol Pot regime by a Vietnamese invasion had given the people more freedom to travel. Many decided to cross the border to Thailand where they could apply to go on to third countries to join relatives or to stay away from an insecure place, or simply to leave behind cruel memories.

With international pressure at the time, Australia loosened its criteria and accepted many more Khmers regardless of whether they had connections (sponsorship, relatives, etc.) in Australia, or spoke English, or had special skills. The intake increased and in 1980, 1300 Cambodian settlers arrived in Australia. The annual intake rose to as high as 4,400 in 1983, but fell to 800 the next year. In all, about 11,700 Cambodians arrived in Australia over the 1980 - 85 period, and by 1986 the total Cambodian born population in Australia had reached 13,900 (Kiernan, 1988). This influx brought in Cambodians of all social levels, with diverse social backgrounds and experiences, including middle to low-level civil servants, teachers, nurses, soldiers and a number of peasants. This group generally have a low level of education, some are uneducated and even illiterate in Khmer. Their previous skills are usually not conducive to meeting the demands of employment in Australian industrial society. This means that most of them are employed, if at all, in unskilled or labouring jobs.

Beside the refugee there is also a small group of Cambodians (500 throughout Australia), who came before the social upheaval in 1975. They came as students, either private or under Colombo plan scholarships, and trainees. With the event in Cambodia in 1975 they could not return home and were compelled to take up residence in

Australia. Many students and trainees managed to complete their education and some are holding professional positions.

Daniel Bell wrote in his article, Ethnicity and Social Change, that: "Ethnicity has become more salient (than class) because it can combine an interest with an affective tie. Ethnicity provides a tangible set of common identifications - in language, food, music, names - when other social roles become more abstract and impersonal. In the competition for the values of the society to be realised politically, ethnicity can become a means of claiming place or advantage." (Bell; 1975:169). He argued that as the result of institutional change, i.e. from manufacturing to service industries where more white-collar jobs are created, class "no longer seemed to carry any strong affective tie."

For the Khmer their diverse social backgrounds mean that they have diverse social perceptions. Together with the ongoing factional and political conflict in Cambodia this ensures that the Khmer community in Australia is less than united. The divisions are along the lines of previous and present status, level of education, caste distinctions during Pol Pot's time ("base" and "new" people) and the political factions that mark the present unresolved conflict. Given the size of the community (13,000 in Australia, 5900 in N.S.W.) and the divisions within it, it is nearly impossible for the Cambodians to form an influential ethnic community. There are small community support networks here and there but they could hardly serve to wield political power and be effective in claiming welfare provision for the community. While there certainly are common identifications such as food, music, religion, language, history etc. there are limited signs of affective ties. Imperialist war, social revolution, the present political conflict together with the past and present social positions, contribute to undermine the group's affection. The working class usually want to get on with building their new lives and leave the issues of politics and ethnicity to the more privileged individuals who form the minority.

There are many cases of unaccompanied minors who have no close relatives in Australia to look after them. Their plight resulted from being separated from their parents to perform duties in youth brigades away from their village and family. This policy was applied in many parts of Cambodia during the Pol Pot period. When the Pol Pot period ended in 1979, they could not find their parents or relatives, either because they had died or had since had to move on to other areas. They drifted along and many arrived in Thailand. Some were adopted by foreign families (American, Swedish, Australian, French, etc.), some were adopted by Khmer families, others arrived in third countries as

unaccompanied minors. In Australia they live communally under supervision until they can manage on their own (Plant, 1988).

Now, a few years later, some have received news from their parents, brothers or sisters in Cambodia or Thailand and will eventually have to consider rejoining their family in Cambodia or bring them to Australia under some sort of family reunion. In the future, when Cambodia is recognised diplomatically by Australia ,there will be many requests for family reunion by Cambodian refugees living here.

Also alarming is the high number of lone parents among the Cambodian settlers in Australia. Their husbands (or wives) died or were killed during the war and the social upheaval. In Cambodia, too, this phenomenon has demanded urgent attention. In Cambodia, women comprise about 65 per cent of the adult population. Among them there are many widows. In Australia, as well as in Cambodia, many widows are raising families and in some cases orphaned relatives as well. A higher number of men died, not only because they were soldiers. From various interviews with people in different parts of Cambodia, it appears that women survived the starvation in the Pol Pot period better than men, and that men were looked upon by the Pol Pot cadres as a more dangerous element to the survival of the regime. So men who used to serve in the former regimes' armies or administrations, or men who considered resistance, were subject to greater suspicion and huge numbers were eliminated.

Now, in Australia, "in 1981, more than one in eight women aged 15 years and over were widows. Of these, 92 percent were unemployed or outside the work force." (Kiernan, 1988). They are struggling to bring up children, many of adolescent age, single handed. Besides recovering from the death of their husbands, they have to adjust to their new lives in Australia and at the same time ensure that their children are adequately looked after and their future is intact. The task is almost insurmountable given the unfamiliar environment.

Unlike their Greek, or Italian, or even Vietnamese counterparts, Cambodian refugees have generally arrived in Australia empty handed. Very few manage to smuggle valuable possessions with them. As the result, the Cambodian community is a poor one, with all members starting their lives in Australia from scratch. For most Cambodians their first encounter with "wealth" in Australia is their Social Security cheque. While some Chinese and Vietnamese counterparts excel in business ventures, Cambodians have no capital to start such ventures except for the very few who have been here longer and managed to save up for such purposes.

Another distinction between refugees and migrants is that the refugees never consciously made up their mind to leave home. They left home out of necessity and many adult refugees hope to return when the situation at home regains "normalcy" as they perceive it. For some, this mentality interferes gravely with their effort to acculturate. For example, some see no point in putting energy into learning English which will not be very useful on their return home. So they may not try. On the other hand, it is also arguable that some Khmer refugees in Australia have found, after a serious unsuccessful trial, that life here is so alienating that they long to return home where they can once again be in charge of their life.

Whatever the case may be, this sojourner mentality is rather sad. Given the ongoing political conflict and uncertainty in the region it is very unlikely that most will ever return, nor be able to return as the children become older and life becomes more established. Also, there is no guarantee that modern Cambodia will develop politically, socially and economically, as they have been hoping. This would sadly leave them high and dry, as in the case of refugees from Argentina and Uruguay who returned home after the overthrow of the military regimes to find their "resettlement materially and socially impossible" (Morrissey, 1987:27).

So most adult Cambodian refugees will remain in Australia permanently. Their emotional feeling will depend very much on the achievements of their children. There exists already what is known as an "ethnic island" where the Cambodian build themselves a self-contained social and cultural world that they share with their small cohesive group. I suspect, however, that most of them, at some point in time, feel frustrated, alienated, lonely and miss home gravely.

It is expected, however, that their children will become more acculturated as they are exposed to a wider social interaction through schooling, socialisation and the work place. It is doubtful, however, that in social status they will rise above their parents, especially those who arrived here at an older adolescent age. Having been deprived of several years of schooling, during the Pol Pot period and the time they spent in refugee camps, their chances of success in education is very slim. It seems therefore, that the Cambodian community will have to wait even longer to witness the rise in status of members of their community, i.e. they have to wait for those who arrived here at the age of ten or younger to achieve success and be able to benefit fully from the Australian educational system. Even then, like all Australians who come from working class backgrounds, the competition will be very fierce indeed for them.

CHAPTER TWO: THE SITUATION BEFORE AND ON ARRIVAL

THE INTERVIEWING

The sample of thirty adolescents, sixteen males and fourteen females, was chosen as my research progressed. (See Table A at the end of this chapter.) They were introduced or made known to me by friends, relatives and their teachers. Most (26) of the interviews were done in the interviewees' homes; four interviews were done at a school. Another school I approached denied me access to students on the school grounds. The school's principal and administrator were worried about researchers and journalists, as the controversial issue of the alleged 'failure' of the settlement of Indo-Chinese refugees was raging early this year. They were, however, prepared to give me the students' addresses and phone numbers.

According to the 1986 Australian Bureau of Statistics Census, in N.S.W. there were 5,898 Cambodians, of whom 1,517 were adolescents aged between fifteen and twenty-four. The sample of thirty therefore, although small, represents nearly two per cent of the Cambodian adolescent population in N.S.W. Each interviewee was asked the same, approximately 72, questions concerning the interviewee's personal information and history, his/her schooling outside Australia and in Australia, employment record and (Khmer) language ability.

Individual interviewing was the method used. Many interviews were done in the family living area where other members relaxed or watched T.V. I was very much regarded as a guest of the house and it was therefore not considered polite for the host to leave me on my own. As the interviewing went on, most of the time, it became obvious that only the interviewee was needed and the rest could go on performing their household functions as usual. However, some parents or family members were curious and liked to know what sort of questions were being asked. Humorous interjections often took place and sometimes I could sense that I was entertaining a group of people (family members and neighbours) who were unemployed, with not much to do, and keen to meet a new person.

Parents very much welcomed my study and hoped that it would highlight the problems their children are facing and that changes would take place to help their children excel in schooling and employment.

I was frequently asked to join the family meal or have a drink or a snack as we compared notes on lives in Cambodia and Australia. I usually left the family carrying bundles of prepared food and/or vegetables (chilli, lemon grass, etc.) that they grew in their garden. We exchanged phone numbers and have remained in contact.

The questionnaires are in Khmer. The interviewing was mostly conducted in Khmer except for a few interviewees with whom I had to jump from Khmer to English to Khmer as I detected their lack of understanding in Khmer. However, sometimes their English was not much better than their poor Khmer.

PARENT'S BACKGROUND

The sample of 30 interviewees came from 23 different families, as it included seven pairs of brothers and sisters (I limited myself to interviewing a maximum of two persons from a family).

Their fathers' professions in Cambodia can be divided into three groups. Eleven of the 23 were of middle-low level civil servant backgrounds, ranging from teacher, nurse, post office worker, customs officer, to soldier. Two were of small business background - provincial or local rice dealer or distributor of food and utensils. Ten families were former peasants. Six families came from the city of Phnom Penh, while the other 17 families came from four provinces (Kompong Thom, Battambang, Kampot and Kompong Cham), mostly from Battambang, a province bordering Thailand.

Two families were of Chinese descent. Both interviewees spoke Chinese fluently. One to them learnt Chinese for two years when she was in a refugee camp. She also went to Chinese Saturday school for two years in Sydney's western suburbs. The other one had been attending Chinese Saturday school since he arrived in Sydney in 1982.

AGE

The sample consisted of sixteen males and fourteen females. My intention was to look at the 15 - to - 24 age group. However the inclusion of two interviewees aged 28 and 29 provided an interesting study of people with longer experience in Cambodia who had started their education in Australia as mature age students. The rest of the sample was between 14 and 24 years of age.

All of the sample left Cambodia between the ages of six and nineteen years old. By the time they arrived in Australia they were between ten and twenty-one years old.

This is their real age as opposed to their officially stated age. (The officially stated age is the age that they adopted when they sought migration from refugee camps to a third country.) Reduction of one's age is quite widespread among Cambodian (and Vietnamese and Lao for that matter) adolescents.

Parents and guardians responsible for this believe that it would allow their children a few more years of access to education in Australia. This is done largely to compensate for the four years absented from education during the Pol Pot time and time spent in refugee camps. It is assumed that would allow them time to catch up with language and other general knowledge of Australia. Sometimes age reduction was done mistakenly if a sponsor in Australia did not know their exact age while filling out immigration forms. My sample shows that, except for eleven people who did not adopt a new age, the rest reduced their age by between one and five years with a reduction of one or two years more common than of three, four or five years. Except for one female, who reduced her age from 21 to 16, large reductions mainly occurred with the males. It is obvious that obtaining a substantial education is seen to be more important for males than females, and to achieve that goal it is necessary for some to reduce their age substantially.

They don't, however, always achieve that goal by reducing the age. One of my male sample who had his age reduced from 21 to 17 dropped out of school last year when he reached the end of year 11. When a job opportunity turned up during the summer holiday he decided not to return to start his year 12 in 1988. This could perhaps be attributed to his strong desire to be an adult, to be independent from his family like some of his friends (of his own real age) who were then working. His desire to be economically independent at least for a while was very strong as he did intend to return to do some more study after six months. It seems to me that he just wanted to find out what it is like to be 21, as opposed to being a 17 year-old schoolboy. His job as a marble cutter in a local factory serves this purpose. Perhaps he could save some money, learn to drive, buy a car - a dream for many Cambodian young men who are impatient with schooling. However, he recognised the importance of acquiring a skill for his future in Australia. This reflects his mature approach to life. He wanted to return to a technical school where he could learn motor mechanics. But that, of course, would depend on whether there was a place available for him for such training. It would also depend whether or not his willingness to study will be superseded by his desire for more money and independence forever from his widowed mother. She is living in a rented, tumble down Housing Commission home

with his older brother and sister who are factory workers, and a younger brother still at high school. Schooling had not been easy for him. In response to the question of why he left school, he said, "I could not go on academically, even though I want to do more study." It is quite possible that he will remain an unskilled worker for the rest of his life.

While the above story is not very encouraging, another case of age reduction ends on a more successful note. A 24 year-old male, who had his age reduced to 21, is now attending a first year Bachelor of Science course at N.S.W. University.

While it is impossible to speculate, two females who had their age reduced from 16 to 13 and 21 to 16 respectively are quite happily attending year 7 and year 10 at Ambervale High School.

It is very difficult to gauge the advantages and disadvantages of age reduction. However it is certain that age reduction gives those who arrived in Australia at an older age more flexibilities and options to pursue, and allows them more time for socialisation and for schooling if that is what they wish. The 21 year-old girl, for example, arrived in Australia over three years ago (March 1985) when she was 18. If she had not had her age reduced by five years she would have been pressured to attend Adult Migrant Education courses, or be placed at a higher level of education where she would not have coped academically, like her older sister (who we will look at later). Instead, with an official age of 13 on arrival she was able to attend an Intensive language Unit at Liverpool for one year before she started year 7 at Busby High School. The family moved a couple of times and in 1988 when the family settled in Campbelltown she was placed at year 10 at Ambervale High School.

With our system of education where pupils are vertically placed according to their age it is important to know what one wants out of it. For her, on paper, at least she has received a standard education if she resolves to stick with it for a few more years, during which time her English will become more proficient. Her performance at school is not very promising, as she expressed grave concern about the progress she made. Her complaints included "I don't understand the subjects very well". "I'm not familiar with the subjects". "I did not get good marks". However, if nothing substantial comes out of this round of education she will, at least, acquire a knowledge of what is available to her in the future, as a mature age student or whatever. She will be better prepared, supported by a general background of education and socialisation experiences.

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These options are not open to her older (by one year) sister who did not have her age reduced. Arriving in Australia (in March 1985) at 19 years she was enrolled to study English at the hostel with the Adult Migration Education program for several weeks. In 1986 she enrolled in a course at Bankstown College where she learnt "every subject, Science, Maths, English,...." The course frustrated her tremendously, as she "couldn't understand the subjects and what the teacher said. It was too difficult and at the end of six months I stopped". After living on unemployment benefits for one year she found a job as a machinist in Cabramatta, and later on as a rag cutter with the Saint Vincent de Paul Society in Sydney, where she's now working. Since she left Bankstown College she has never done any post-school or work training despite her willingness to do so. It is very unlikely that she will receive a decent job training that will qualify her for a better position in the future as she still doesn't speak very much English and is due to marry an Australian co-worker at the end of this year.

While it is hard to balance the advantage and disadvantage of age reduction one thing is certain: it doesn't suit everybody. The person concerned should be consulted, especially on a big reduction. Worse still, many parents reduced their children's age without knowing the exact reasons or options available. They blindly followed other people without considering their own situation. As a result many parents and adolescents now want to reverse the process.

The psychological effect on someone who has to behave and think younger than their age is indeterminable, especially after a big reduction. While some are happy with the arrangement others are frustrated and alienated by it all. During the course of my teaching it was heart-breaking to watch someone who was unhappily placed in a class with 13 year-old pupils, while he was 18 and wanted to work and be independent.

Once a family arrives in Australia it is nearly impossible to change an adolescent age back. A seventeen year-old girl who had her age reduced to thirteen by her adopted Cambodian parents sought to reverse her age change when she arrived in Melbourne. Never having been able to get on with her adopted parents she had been hoping that when she arrived in Australia she'd be able to go to work (any type of work), move out of home and be independent from them. However, she could not do that, as she was officially still under school leaving age. In consultation with a Cambodian social worker, she was told that to regain her original age would require medical approval. This involves medical processes such as the examination of her palm, bones, skull, etc. According to her previous experience the social worker said that this process could take up to five years. This disappointed the girl a great deal as she realised that she had to go to school

for the next two to three years, whether she liked it or not, and put up with her adopted parents until she reached the school leaving age. It's a long time to wait for someone who is unhappy.

To my surprise three of my interviewees had had their age augmented rather than reduced. All three attributed this to the misunderstanding of their guardians or sponsors in the process of filling out immigration application forms. Guardians and sponsors in these cases did not know their ages. As forms had to be filled out immediately to accelerate their application, there was no time to wait for the return mail from the refugee camp in Thailand. This guess work put their ages up by 2, 4 and 5 years. While it doesn't worry the man who had his age augmented by two years it upsets the two women who had their ages augmented by 4 and 5 years. However there is little they can do about this. One of them is doing third year Bachelor of Science as a mature age student; the other is doing a C.E.S. clerical training course after she dropped out of school at the end of year 11.

EDUCATION IN CAMBODIA

As the majority (23) of the sample left Cambodia in 1979 - 80 they did not receive any education provided by the post 1979 Heng Samrin government before they left Cambodia. In fact only five of the others received formal education, for one or two years, provided by the Heng Samrin government soon after Pol Pot was ousted. There are another two who did not leave Cambodia until 1981, but did not go to school. One was of Chinese background and her family probably did not value Khmer education much. When she arrived in Thailand she studied Chinese for two years before she came to Australia. However, there are other reasons for some people not having received any education under the Heng Samrin government. First, schooling was not compulsory; secondly, there was no school in their area yet; and thirdly, they were planning on leaving and saw no point in studying.

According to their age, about fourteen of the sample were old enough to have received some education before the Pol Pot time (before 1975). However only nine did. Seven out of the nine were from urban backgrounds, with parents working as civil servants. Five of those who did not receive any education and two who did, were of peasant background. Even though education was nearly free, it is obvious that either schooling was not available in their rural area or that the need to cultivate the land over-rode the desire for educational benefits. Among the nine who received some education before the Pol Pot

time, the two adults received ten and twelve years respectively, while the other seven received only between one and four years each.

Only two of the sample studied English in Cambodia, for one year each. One went to the only English school in Cambodia, while the other studied English as part of the Foreign Language program at school.

EDUCATION IN THE REFUGEE CAMPS

Immediately before their arrival in Australia all of the sample (except for the two who went via Vietnam) had spent between several months and six years in refugee camps in Thailand, mostly in Khao-I-Dang. As the refugee population initially increased in the camps along the Thai border, schools were set up by UNICEF and other humanitarian agencies to provide education in Khmer for all school age children. Teachers and administrators were drawn from the human resources available in the camp.

Schooling in the camp was free and many parents sent their children to school. Out of the 28 of my sample who went to Thailand all but six of them went to school in the camp. The two adults found education in the camp at the time below their capacity, while the other four did not stay in the camp long enough to make schooling worthwhile.

The 22 interviewees of my sample who went to school in the camps received between one and five years of schooling. For most of them the skills of reading and writing Khmer were largely obtained in the camp. While schooling in the camp was essential socially and educationally, especially for those who stayed a long time, it was not possible to provide quality education in the circumstances. Not only were there shortages of trained teachers but teaching and reading materials and equipment for teachers and students were also in short supply. Classroom populations were unstable as some moved in and some out all the time as they arrived from Cambodia or left to go to third countries. Intermittent fighting along the Thai-Cambodian border also disrupted the classes, sometimes for a long time until order was re-established. The prison-like situation in the camps, with soldiers and machine guns present everywhere, hindered the students' learning and exploring experiences.

The two of my sample who went to Vietnam went to school there for 5-6 years. They now read, write and, perhaps, speak Vietnamese better than Khmer. In fact the boy who is now in year 11 at Marrickville High School goes to Saturday school where students are

ınd sciences by Vietnamese teachers. There are no such classes offered his knowledge of Vietnamese has indeed been very useful.

in the refugee camps, one needed to pay. English classes were offered ew refugees who taught as a way of earning some money. Only four of afford to learn English and for only several months to two years (for).

ion on arrival, therefore, can be described as follows:

x of my sample had no knowledge of English when they arrived in The six who attended some English classes in the camp or in Cambodia only a short time. Their English was barely usable.

in Cambodia, before Pol Pot's time or later during the Heng Samrin ch I regard as adequate education, was experienced by only half of the lowever, except for the two adults who received ten and twelve years rest (13) received only between one and four years of schooling.

ucation in the camp was disruptive and academically ineffective, it the only education for twelve of the sample. Those who stayed in the a long time (4-6 years) became quite literate in Khmer. However even who only stayed one or two years, the introduction to Khmer literacy ificant impact on their lives.

he sample missed out on education altogether (in Cambodia and in the ey missed out on education in Cambodia either because they were too go to school before 1975 (two of the sample) or their parents couldn't send them to school (one of peasant background). None of the three Cambodia (after Pol Pot was ousted) or in the camps, long enough to ntage of the education provided. Two of the sample however stayed in for one-and-a-half and two years, but did not get around to going to his is not unusual as refugees were moved from place to place as y the Thai authorities and the Cambodian factional leaders. They did not to settle down to education.

ugh only three of the sample had missed out on education completely y arrived in Australia, I found that at the time of interview seven of the

30 were illiterate in Khmer. This was due to the fact that since they had arrived in Australia there had been no systematic reinforcement to maintain their knowledge of Khmer. The situation was particularly vulnerable for those who received only a little education in Cambodia or Thailand. None of my sample had received any substantial mother-tongue maintenance at school (Community Language program) or at Saturday school since they arrived in Australia. Obviously there is a danger that more will become illiterate in Khmer the longer they stay in Australia.

6. Thirteen of the sample are classified as semi-literate. I include in this category those people who can read (some quite well, others not so well) but can not write. It includes people who said: "I can't write", "I can't write letters to my relatives", or "I can't make up sentences". This means that while they know the Khmer alphabet and how the letters are put together and can read moderately well, their knowledge of the Khmer written language is not usable.

7. Therefore 20 (7 + 13) of the sample (70 per cent) are illiterate or semi-literate in Khmer. For this group the prospect is very depressing as I detected that some are losing their speaking skills as well. They could not understand some simple words and could hardly answer the questions in full sentences. For some of them I had to conduct the interview going back and forth in English and Khmer, as sometimes their English was no better than their poor Khmer. Even more depressing, I could not get through in either or both languages in some cases. These people are really trapped between the two languages. They are not proficient in any language.

8. Only ten of the sample therefore are literate in Khmer.

TABLE A: Profile of the Sample

Interviewees	Sex		Age		Parents' employment in Cambodia	Time spent in refugee camp	Date of arrival in Australia	Literacy in Khmer now	Time spent learning English
	M	F	Real	Unreal					
1		x	28	33	Post Office worker	3 years	08-10-81	literate	1 year in Cambodia
2		x	19	18	Teacher	5 months	27-09-80	semi-literate	none
3	x		23	22	As above	As above	As above	literate	1 year in Cambodia
4		x	19	18	Foreign Affairs officer	6 years in Vietnam	27-11-86	semi-literate	none
5	x		21	19	As above	As above	As above	semi-literate	none
6	x		29	31	Custom officer	1.5 years	-10-80	literate	none
7		x	20	17	Small business	2 years	25-03-83	illiterate	1 year in refugee camp
8	x		18	17	Teacher	1.5 years	27-07-82	semi-literate	1 year in refugee camp
9		x	14	14	Teacher	6 years	-06-87	literate	none
10		x	15	15	Soldier	5-6 years	10-03-87	literate	none
11	x		21	17	Soldier	7 months	25-11-83	illiterate	none
12	x		16	15	As above	As above	As above	illiterate	none
13	x		24	21	Peasants	1 year	10-12-80	literate	none
14	x		18	18	As above	As above	As above	illiterate	none
15		x	17	21	Peasants	1.5 years	-08-81	illiterate	none
16		x	17	17	Peasants	4.5 years	-12-84	semi-literate	none
17		x	15	15	Small business	4 years	26-04-83	semi-literate	none
18	x		18	17	As above	As above	As above	semi-literate	none
19	x		16	16	Peasants	3.5 years	03-03-83	literate	none
20	x		19	19	Peasants	5 years	25-11-83	literate	none
21	x		17	17	Peasants	4.5 years	07-06-83	literate	none
22		x	16	13	Nurse	4 years	-04-83	semi-literate	none
23	x		21	20	Transport Department	2.5 years	10-01-83	literate	2 years in refugee camp
24		x	21	16	Peasants	5 years	05-03-85	semi-literate	none
25		x	22	22	As above	As above	As above	literate	none
26	x		16	15	Civil Servant	1 year	25-08-83	semi-literate	none
27	x		18	18	As above	As above	As above	semi-literate	7 months in refugee camp
28		x	20	20	Peasants	2.5 years	-11-82	semi-literate	none
29	x		19	17	Peasants	1.5 years	-08-81	illiterate	none
30		x	18	18	Peasants	4 years	24-06-83	semi-literate	none

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CHAPTER THREE: THE SETTLEMENT PROCESS

The sample arrived in Australia between 1980 and 1987 when they were between 10 and 21 years old. One thing all the sample had in common as they arrived in Australia was that they all wanted to do some more study. How they went about it and where they started depended very much on their ages and on their educational, emotional and financial capacity.

SCHOOLING

Except for three older people, interviewees 1, 6 and 25, whom I will discuss later (in special cases), the rest of the sample went to primary school if they were of primary school age, or went to an Intensive Language Unit (ILU) or High School if they were of High School age. As many of them had had their age reduced, eleven of the sample whose official ages were between 8 and 13 went to Primary School. Some of them started as low as year 4, and worked their way through the primary system and then went on to High School. (See Table B: Schooling)

Very few primary schools in Sydney provide an English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher to help migrant children with their English. Only five of the sample who went to primary school were fortunate enough to be placed in such schools, where they were given English lessons separately from other children for 4 to 6 months. It is hard to imagine what it was like for the other six who did not speak any English (or little English) to be placed in a class full of strangers. It must have been quite horrifying.

Learning English

The other 16 of the sample all went to an Intensive Language Unit (ILU). There are about 12 ILU and Intensive Language Centres (ILC) throughout Sydney. They are places where newly-arrived migrants of high school age are taught English before they move to high school. Other subjects are also taught such as Maths, Science, History, Geography, Chemistry, Music etc. It is the most effective way of learning English - i.e. applied English. It is also the most effective way of preparing students for high school, as these same subjects are taught there. It also provides a slow and quiet transition to high school as the class size is small (10-12 students) and students can become quite intimate with their teachers and are more inclined to ask questions. It is particularly useful for students who need to build up their confidence, to learn about new customs and ways of life.

Overall, it's a time for newly arrived students slowly to get to know things around them, such as the schooling system, socialisation, shopping, banking, etc.

In many ILUs, students are at the beginning placed according to their knowledge of English. They are then moved up the grades according to the progress they make. The teachers at ILUs together with high school teachers decide when the students are ready to start high school and at what level.

The time each student spends at an ILU depends very much on the progress he/she makes. A teacher at Cabramatta ILU said that migrant students spent an average of three terms (there are four terms in a school year) before they moved to high school. Cambodian students, however, usually have to stay longer, he said.

According to my sample, among the 16 (only five had previous knowledge of English) who went to an ILU, the majority (12) spent one to one and a half years there. Three spent less than one year while one had to spend two years. That the Cambodian students need more time at ILU is not surprising. Over and above their weak knowledge of English, which is shared in some cases by students of other nationalities, the Cambodian students have other problems such as learning difficulties, inability to retain information and a weak conceptual understanding of subject matter as the result of disrupted, brief, or no schooling, an experience we examined earlier.

Teachers at ILUs also attribute this slow acquisition of English to the fact that some Cambodian students are illiterate in Khmer. Literacy in the mother tongue, they think, is very important in learning another language. The mere fact that students can write down the meaning of each word in their own language helps them a great deal in memorising the words.

Other skills associated with learning the mother tongue also help. One ESL teacher said: "skills such as being able to use the dictionary, take notes and running translations in their language certainly help them with comprehension. The kids who are illiterate rely totally on their memories and understanding at the time. Things are harder to measure whether the development and literacy skills in your own language have some flowing effect on the development and literacy in the second language. I suspect it does."

For those fortunate enough to have been exposed to the Khmer written language, the experiences gained from learning the dynamics (sound, the art of putting pen on

paper,...) of the 33 consonants and 21 vowels that constitute the Khmer alphabet, must provide an impetus for learning English.

My sample shows that a substantial prior knowledge of English has speeded up the progress of two students who spent respectively only two months and three terms at ILU. They also received respectively four, and six and a half, years of education in Khmer, and are literate in Khmer. Another student who also spent three terms at ILU did not have any knowledge of English to start with, but was backed up by six years of education in Khmer in Cambodia and refugee camp and is literate in Khmer. The other three students who had a previous knowledge of English but only had 2-3 years of education in Khmer, and are illiterate or semi-literate in Khmer, had to spend one year or more at ILU. This means that a concrete knowledge of Khmer has a great influence on the learning of English regardless of previous knowledge of English.

It is interesting to note that students who spent more than one year at ILU are mostly characterised by their low level of education in Khmer. They had received only between one and three years of education in Cambodia and mostly in a refugee camp. Except for one, they are either illiterate or semi-literate in Khmer. A student who was illiterate in Khmer spent two years at ILU. This shows that while a previous knowledge of English does not necessarily mean a short stay at ILU, the low level of education in Khmer certainly slows down progress at ILU.

All 16 of the interviewees who went to ILU thought that the time they spent there was useful at least for the improvement of their English. Given that only five of them had any knowledge of English before they started at ILU, their progress was good. At the end of the course they "could understand English", "could and dared to speak to the teachers", "could speak, read and write English". A then fourteen year-old son of a peasant from Battambang province said: "I didn't know a word of English to start with but one and a half years later I could write and speak".

English was not the only subject at which the students benefitted from ILU. Some students found that they improved their knowledge of maths, science, history, geography, chemistry, etc. during their stay there. While learning to read, write and speak English grammatically was their main aim, ILU students also mentioned the learning of Australian customs and way of life. For many students, ILU was the first place they learnt about Australia and Australian history.

Compared with High School to which they later moved, some students reminisced about the ILU's slow pace of learning. As a place where students are prepared for high school, learning "without pressure" at ILU is perhaps not so successful. It is, however, complemented by the fact that "everything was explained properly", said a then 12 year-old boy of peasant background who had had no English to start with and at the end of one year was given an award for English, and was even asked to tell a joke.

While nine students said that the time they spent at ILU was too long, five said 'enough' and two said 'too short'. However only one said: "it was a waste of time". Other criticisms included: "...too much emphasis on writing, not enough on speaking", "the subjects taught were easy, I had done them before", and "... the rest of the students don't speak English correctly", which gave him no ground to practice or improve his English.

High School

The 27 interviewees who went to primary school or ILU to start with all went or intended to go on to high school. At the time of interview - in the first half of 1988 - three were still at ILU. They all intended to go on to high school later in the year. Nineteen interviewees were high school students ranging from year 7 to year 12; two were university students - first year science and third year medicine; three left high school - two at the end of year 11, one at the end of year 8 (and is now married with one child). There were altogether 24 interviewees who have been or are going through High School.

The 24 students are going or went to eleven different high schools in Sydney's western suburbs from Marrickville to Cabramatta and Campbelltown. The majority of the students (18) liked their school. Only one disliked it. The rest preferred to say: "it's alright" or "not much". More than anything else students and teachers are the determining factors of how one feels about school. The interviewees like school because "the teachers are kind and explain things clearly", "people are friendly" etc.

While having "many good friends" is an important factor, their ethnic composition doesn't seem to matter. A sixteen year-old girl liked her school because "I have many nice Cambodian friends" at school while a nineteen year-old boy liked his school even though there were only two Cambodian students in the whole school. I detect, however, that students who go to schools where there are many Cambodians seem to feel more secure (happier, more outgoing, not worrying so much about doing the wrong thing, more relaxed) than those who go to schools with few Cambodians. The former group

feel that they belong to a group of people to whom they can turn for support, or when they are in trouble.

Liking school does not necessarily mean that they are doing well at school. Two interviewees left school at the end of year 11 because "I can't cope", and "school work is too difficult". However, they still liked their schools and thought they were good schools.

One student does not like his school because he does not like his chances of getting into university. The school has a reputation of being unable to deliver the goods: "not many students have been accepted to go to university", said a twenty year-old son (in year 11) of a former civil servant in Cambodia (now a bus conductor). This problem is typical of an ambitious student with an ambitious background being brought up in an Australian working class setting. The rosy expectations of life in Australia slowly disappeared as he realised that there were many odds against him and his success. This disappoints and angers him as the issues of class and ethnicity, which were not his problems in Cambodia, become the main barrier to his success. He is not the only one in this bind.

Problems at High School

In response to the question what are/were your main problems at school, the students mentioned subject matter 23 times, racial attitudes seven times, students three times, and a teacher once. As subject matter is frequently seen as a problem it is obvious that the students are concerned with their progress at school. Subject matters are certainly their main worries, and I will discuss this in detail later.

Racial Attitudes

Five boys and two girls mentioned racial attitudes as their problem at school. Perhaps it is true that men are more racially vulnerable or are subject to more racial attacks than women. For most of these schools, Asian faces are a new phenomenon that students and teachers are still adjusting to. The situation has improved as more and more Asians arrive. An eighteen year old boy, who is now in year 12 and has been attending his High School since year 7, said: "There were racist attitudes in the early days, but now with so many Asians ..." It could be that a racist attitude is still there but now with many Asians around he feels more confident in ignoring it than before, when all the racist remarks were aimed at the very few Asians present.

It seems that students who go to schools, where there are many Asians or Cambodians, become more capable of coping with racial remarks than those who go to schools where not many Asians are present.

Interviewees who went to schools where there weren't many Cambodians described racial attitudes rather bitterly. A year 12, nineteen year old, good natured boy, who goes to a school where there is only one other Cambodian boy (and not many other Asians), said: "They don't want to make friends with people with black hair, ... they don't ask us to join a sports team or .... we won't get in unless we know somebody". Obviously he has been rejected by 'the gang' and he is hurt by it.

Students who went to a school where there are many Cambodians around seem to be able to ignore or disregard racial remarks, such as "go back to your home" or jokes at their expense. I admire them for this as it is not all that easy to ignore such comments. When I was told to 'go back home' by a troublesome Australian born student at a working-class High School in Melbourne where I was the only Asian teacher, I was quite shocked. Some fellow teachers voiced the idea that the student be expelled but that was not what I wanted. When the teacher-in-charge talked the student into apologising to me, it was all over. A few years later when I was not at that school any more, a fellow teacher told me that the student had recently been expelled for other misdemeanours, I couldn't help feeling quite pleased.

Not only students display racial attitudes, teachers too were mentioned by one interviewee as "disliking Asian students".

Students and Teachers

Fellow students were mentioned as a problem at school by two male and one female interviewee. They complained about it being "hard to make sense" of the students or that "I dislike their vulgar behaviour ... they stamp on the table and I can't study". Cultural misunderstanding exists between fellow students of different racial backgrounds. There are so few complaints however, that they need to be congratulated as we all know it takes time to understand fully the behaviour or expression of someone from another culture.

Teachers were mentioned as a problem once by an interviewee who is doing year 12. He said "some teachers are inexperienced, ... can't teach and don't know their subjects very well". This comment is rather out of place as teachers are traditionally seen as unquestionable by Cambodian students and parents.

Subject Matter

Twenty students out of 24 mentioned subject matter as their main problem at school. Sixteen cited English as the most difficult subject. In NSW migrant students are doing the same English syllabus as the rest of the students throughout high school and for the Higher School Certificate. In some high schools there are provisions for English-as-a-Second Language teachers to help migrant students with the subject but at the end they are faced with the same exam paper as the rest of the students.

The saddest thing is that their difficulty with English does not diminish the longer they stay in Australia. Complaints about English as a difficult subject come from those who have been here recently (one year) as well as those who have been here for a long time (eight years). It is obvious that eight years in Australia is not a long enough time to become proficient in English (I wonder how long it takes).

The degree of difficulty varies from student to student. A nineteen year old girl who came to Australia eight years ago is now in the top class of year 12. Having arrived in Australia quite young (eleven years old) she went to year 4 (primary school) and conscientiously worked her way through Primary School and high school. Family background, encouragement and support form the foundation of her success. Although only semi-literate in Khmer she was certain of passing her HSC, but at the same time she mentioned English, and among other subjects, Chemistry and Economics, as the most difficult subjects. Her older brother, who is literate in Khmer and is now a third-year medical student, said that when he was at high school English was his only difficult subject.

At the other end of the spectrum there is a twenty year old girl, who is having difficulties with "every subject including English". She been here for five years (this is her HSC year), and her teacher said: "she won't pass, she'll get twenty per cent". The student knows this but what can she do? She is a serious person who has been trying very hard for the last five years but things don't improve for her. There is nothing for her to do at home, there is no job available, her older brother who failed HSC last year is still looking for work. Her older unmarried sister is working in a clothing factory. There do not seem to be any eligible men around, so the only respectable place for her at the moment is school. When I saw her she was happy enough and enjoying her time at school with friends even though she realised that the future is less than bright. In fact she's already set on the clothing factory at the end of this year.

While it is hard to assess how they're going at school generally now and will in the future, interviewees who have been here for four, five or six years and are doing year 9, 10 or 11, are worrying about their progress or lack of it, in English. Many are cruising along waiting for a miracle.

While it is not so hard to make themselves understood through oral communication the students find it extremely difficult to put pen to paper. Worrying about sentence structure and grammar can sometimes retard their thinking as they know what to say but can not formally put it on paper. Perhaps it will come with practice but it takes such a long time that, for many, their time at high school will pass unsuccessfully because of their inability to get on top of English in the meantime.

In addition to the writing and comprehension difficulties are the cultural differences. A student who is doing year 12 and has been here for eight years said: "while I like reading (English) novels there are parts which I understand and parts which I don't". This is not so much because of unknown words but rather his preconception is different from the novelist's. Writers usually assume certain knowledge, cultural or social, on the part of their readers - knowledge that teenage Cambodian students do not possess. Every piece of writing is loaded with cultural values and assumptions which are accepted as aspects of reality by the writers who have grown up in that culture. Thinking back to my time at the only English high school in Cambodia when I forced myself to stumble through Shakespeare's Hamlet, I feel extremely sorry for the Cambodian students who have to try to make sense out of David Williamson's The Club or worse still, Jane Austen's Pride and Prejudice. There is nothing that a peasant boy or girl from Battambang can identify with in those novels. Well, how can they enjoy reading them?

Not that they will never understand western or Australian culture and its sense of humour, but time - a long time - is needed to capture them. I remember, for example, my parents' generation who could enjoy Voltaire's satirical works and could retell La Fontaine's folk tales to their children, even though it was rather out of place, but that was after over twenty years of exposure to French culture and at a time when Khmer literature was suppressed. If that is the duration needed, it will be too late for the Cambodian adolescents in Australia who have to face their exams, HSC or whatever, in the next few years.

Other difficult subjects mentioned by the students are Maths (ten times), science (three times), chemistry (five times) and physics (three times). Subjects such as geography, ancient history and Japanese are also mentioned sporadically as difficult subjects.

A twenty-one year old girl told me that she finds Science very hard to understand because: "I haven't learnt about it before". This was not exactly the only reason as she later mentioned pollution as a science topic which is hard to understand. Coming from a peasant background there is no wonder that she is not familiar with industrial pollution.

There is also a problem associated with language. Subjects such as maths, science, biology, chemistry are made difficult because "it contains so many difficult, unfamiliar, and long words", "I don't understand the questions asked in maths, history and science". Also writing up Chemistry experimental reports, for example, can be quite difficult for those without mastery of writing skills.

Assistance with School Work

Most of the 30 interviewees at one stage or another, had problems with their school work. When asked to whom did they refer the problems, 'teachers' score 25 times, 'friends' score eleven times and 'relatives' score six times.

Only six interviewees had parents, or an older brother, sister or uncle to whom they could turn when they needed help with their school work. This places Cambodian students in a very disadvantaged position. It is, however, very difficult to assess the degree of disabilities as compared with their Australian counterparts because many Australian working class children too suffer more or less the same disadvantage.

Given however, that most parents of Cambodian students don't speak English and the subject matters taught are culturally unfamiliar to them, it is almost impossible for the students to bring the subject matter taught at school home to be discussed or expanded (their thoughts) at the dining floor.

Teachers and friends are the only available people who can help the Cambodian students with their academic work. However, as many interviewees mentioned later "teachers are very busy" and "it is not easy to get hold of them". This leaves many students frustrated as they cannot turn to anybody for a quick or an extended consultation. In the course of my interviewing work I found myself helping the students with maths, answering social studies questions and helping with other school problems.

Very little "special attention" is given by the school to migrant students. It is either because the school does not realise the need of these students or the school does not have

sufficient resource for that purpose. Only six out of the 30 interviewees mentioned the formal special arrangement where they were given extra tuition in maths or physics or English at lunch time or before school for half an hour or so. It is not known whether teachers do this as part of their duty allocation or over and above it. Some other interviewees mention the informal help they receive from teachers out of their good will or personal sacrifice, such as encouraging the students to come and see them if they had any problem with their work. All this help is very much appreciated.

In response to a question: "are/were you ever elected or given a representative role at school", 25 said "No", one was elected as a prefect for two consecutive years, one was a candidate for Student Council, one was a Public Relation Officer, two were elected Captain of Softball.

"Representative role" at school as we all know is usually held by those with outstanding academic record or those who are good at sport and popular with their peers. It seems that most Cambodian students haven't got those qualifications, as they are of a new and small ethnic group in the school, struggling with their academic work.

However there are some who, I think, are capable of representative roles but are shy, saying that these roles are not for them but for Australian students instead. It is rather revealing that racial dynamics works in such a way that it keeps each person in his or her own place. It is obvious that there is a feeling of animosity about this, but the Cambodian students and many other migrant students have learnt to live with it.

The Financial Factor

One thing on which the government needs to be congratulated, because it works as an incentive to keep many of my interviewees at school, is the introduction of AUSTUDY. Visiting from house to house, I seldom encountered high school age adolescents not attending school or living off their parents or on unemployment benefits. While other factors such as their 'thirst' for education after the Pol Pot time and their parents' belief in education as a vehicle to success are important, AUSTUDY is undoubtedly the most practical means of keeping them at school. Whether they will complete high school successfully or unsuccessfully, they are, at least, given a one-and-only opportunity with financial backing. Also, if their schooling is unsuccessful this time, it will at least provide them with confidence and a socialising experience, and acquaint them with other educational courses available later on in their life.

AUSTUDY takes away the financial pressure on parents and the students. Given the Cambodian tradition of children, especially girls, living with their parents until they get married, there is little urge for the children to live independently. So AUSTUDY provides an extra income for the family, it meets the educational and personal need of the students, such as books, sports uniform, outings, clothes, etc. Even though it is not much, AUSTUDY helps the students to be not so totally dependent on their parents financially - a common reason for friction within the family. It provides both parents and students with financial room for manoeuvre. However, AUSTUDY will only continue to play these important roles if it is subjected to regular adjustment with inflation.

As it is now, many Cambodian students are facing financial problems. In response to the question 'do/did you ever have any money problems in meeting school requirements', 19 said "yes" and eleven said "no". While some cannot afford to buy or pay for the most basic school requirements such as textbooks, school uniforms, or school fees, others have to decline very important social activities, such as excursions or camping, which can cost quite a lot of money. (Camping, for example, could cost up to $30 a night for each student). Some students said that they are exempted from paying certain fees but they have to live with that stigma which is not easy.

Interestingly, of the four students who had discontinued their study, all said "yes" to the above question. A then seventeen year-old girl said that it was financial problems that forced her to get a job as a machinist. It was at the time when her parents, who have five unmarried children including a young baby, had to struggle to meet high rent two years after their arrival in Australia.

Not only students with unemployed parents have problems with money; those whose parents are working do too. An eighteen year-old boy, whose father is a bus conductor and whose mother is a cleaner, with five children and two dependent relatives living with them, is having financial problems, because "I'm not entitled to AUSTUDY as both my parents are working."

Mother-Tongue Maintenance

All of the sample were born in Cambodia before the Pol Pot time (1975) and experienced life right through the Pol Pot period.

They were between 10 and 21 years old when they arrived in Australia. They are the first generation immigrants who have been here for between one and eight years.

ıstralia three of the sample were illiterate in Khmer as they had missed completely in Cambodia or in Thailand. At the time of interview, that seven of them were illiterate. This is because there had been no ɔrcement to maintain their mother-tongue since they had arrived in wo of the interviewees received one year of a Khmer literacy course Cambodian community on the weekends in Cabramatta. A few more nonths and discontinued, for various reasons.

ey would like to be able to read or write more Khmer the answers were e is no lack of interest in learning Khmer. However, there has been very nent. So far there has been only one weekend school operating in ne whole Cambodian community of Sydney. The school is run by two s with very limited funding. Early this year when another school was ɔsemeadow for the expanding number of Cambodian residents in the ea, 50-60 students were enrolled. The school, unfortunately, had to be r two weekends of teaching because of an unresolved dispute with the tor over classroom maintenance.

n in Australia their knowledge of Khmer literacy has receded. There is or it. They seldom write Khmer - perhaps once a week or once a month terms of letters to their friends and relatives in Cambodia and the rest of

s been limited to the letters they received or a few books they have in not easy to get hold of Khmer books. They are rarely found in local kshops. There is no popular Khmer newspaper. The two monthly ating in Sydney are seen as serving one or another political ideology. olds, therefore, subscribe to them, especially among the peasant group leave the issue of politics to the urban and 'educated' dwellers.

iewees speak Khmer (except for one who speaks Chinese) at home. said that they speak English to their brothers and sisters who are at ome older interviewees who received many years of education in nfidently speak or discuss various social or political topics, some young running out of simple vocabulary. For them their knowledge of spoken to the household usage only.

Special Cases

Three interviewees did not fit in with the rest of the sample as they did not go to a primary school, an ILU or a High School. Arriving in Australia in 1981, 1985 and 1980 with official ages of 26, 19 and 23 respectively they were classified as adults (interviewees 1, 25 and 6 respectively).

Special Case One:

The first girl was sponsored by an unrelated Sydney Cambodian resident in Sydney, who mistakenly augmented her age by five years. Having lost contact with the rest of her family during the Pol Pot time she arrived in Australia alone. Her intention to do more studies in Australia was not welcomed by her sponsor. A week after her arrival she was landed with a full-time job as housekeeper in a hospital. Realising the differences of interest between her and her sponsor she gradually moved away from the family. She continued to work for three years before she could save enough money to enable her to go back to school full-time. However, in 1984, she started a part-time evening course at Sydney Technical School doing year 11 while working full-time during the day. In 1985, when she could afford to go to school full-time, she was accepted to do her Higher School Certificate at Randwick Technical School, as a mature age student. She passed HSC with four unit Maths and was accepted in a Bachelor of Science course at Macquarie University. She is now in her third year. Her achievement is grand, and it is useful to look at her background.

The daughter of a Post Office worker in Phnom Penh, she received a solid ten years of education in Cambodia before Pol Pot came to power. During the Pol Pot time her father disappeared, and her mother and some of her nine brothers and sisters died of starvation and diseases. Most of the time she was sent to work, away from her family. In 1979 when Vietnam ousted Pol Pot from power, the chaotic situation brought her to the Thai border. Not knowing what had happened to the rest of her family, she made herself available to be sponsored to a third country. Australia became her destination.

With a very limited knowledge of English to start with, her academic achievement in Australia was certainly enhanced by her education in Khmer. Her literacy in Khmer has no doubt helped to speed up her acquisition of English. Moreover it was obvious that she could apply the knowledge that she had acquired in Khmer into English and she did well in other subjects, such as maths, science, etc. Here is another example of the usefulness of literacy and a general education in the mother tongue. In the HSC year, however, while other subjects were "alright", English was her most difficult subject.

Special Case Two:

This case is quite a common one of someone who arrives in Australia too old to pursue an education through normal channels -- i.e. an Intensive Language Centre, then high school or other institutions -- but not old enough to confidently start working in a new environment where the language, the people and the work ethnic is so strange. It is made worse by the fact that he or she has been living in a refugee camp, has never worked before, and therefore possesses no skills whatsoever. When I was a teacher in Melbourne I again and again met people who were aged between 17 and 22 on arrival and who were undecided whether to join classes with the Adult Migrant Education Services (AMES) or Child Migrant Education Services (CMES) to learn English. Enrolment with AMES means that you are an adult and on unemployment benefit while doing the course, and intend to join the workforce at the end of the ten-week course. Enrolment with CMES or ILU in Sydney means that you are your parent's dependent and therefore not eligible for unemployment benefits, and intend to continue study at high school or other institutions. It's a difficult decision to make as one arrives in a new society. Factors such as previous education, personal views about schooling, relationship with parents or guardians, proficiency in English, skills, etc. must be taken into consideration in order to make a successful decision.

This young woman arrived in Australia over three years ago (March 1985) when she was 19 years old. Coming from a peasant background, her parents could not provide much valuable input into the decision-making process, and there was nobody in the Cambodian community or welfare services to whom she could turn for career or educational advice; she enrolled, reluctantly, to do an English course at the hostel with other adults. Looking back she said she did not know exactly what she wanted and was not told what the outcome would be when she finished the course. Obviously it was a confusing time for her and her parents, who, then, had seven other unmarried children to worry about.

When the English course finished three months later there was no job she could begin. While pondering what to do next, she was told of a course at Bankstown College. The Access Course was set up to prepare young adult migrants like her for further education at TAFE or other similar institutions. For six months she was taught English, science, maths, history, etc. The course was: "far, far too difficult, I could not cope". Subject matters were her main problem, as "I could not understand what the teachers were saying". English and science were her most difficult subjects. When the course ended after six months she realised that further education was not for her. So she went on

unemployment benefits for one year before she could get a job as a machinist in Cabramatta.

She was born in 1966 to a peasant family in Battambang, a wealthy province of Cambodia, generally known as the country's "rice barn". When Pol Pot came to power in 1975 she was nine years old but had never been to school. Obviously the educational expansion of the Sihanouk and Lon Nol eras did not reach some peasant families either due to lack of interest or lack of resources. During the Pol Pot time she was placed in a Mobile Youth Working Brigade which was sent from place to place to fulfil particular projects, such as harvesting or building dams and reservoirs. None of her family members was killed or died during the Pol Pot time, but by the end of 1979 her family was in a shambles with no home, draught animals or agricultural instruments. When all members of the family (parents and eight children) were reunited, they left Cambodia and arrived in a refugee camp in Thailand in 1980. (Again she missed out on an education in Heng Samrin's Cambodia). Without enough money to buy their way around, they were shuffled from one camp to another for two years before they could settle permanently in one camp where the children could go to school. So despite the fact that the family spent five years in Thailand she only received 2-3 years of haphazard education in the camp.

Obviously her educational background is very weak. She can read and write Khmer reasonably but her knowledge of history, science or maths is minimal.

Her parents were prepared to support her and wanted her to go on with study, but she said, "I wanted to stop because I knew that I could not go on academically".

She is now working as a rag cutter with Saint Vincent de Paul and is living with her parents in a three bedroom house with fifteen other members of the family, including two married sisters and their husbands and children.

Special Case Three:

This man was born in 1959 to a family whose father was a Customs Officer in Phnom Penh. When Pol Pot came to power he was 16 years old and had done nearly 12 solid years of education in Phnom Penh. His academic knowledge was of no use to the Pol Pot regime; instead he was sent off to the countryside where he toiled the ricefields for four years. "It was hard work", he said; he was not willing to elaborate any further and relive the bad memories. His father was killed in 1978, only a few months before the Vietnamese arrived to rescue him and the rest of his family.

Impressed with the idea of living in a Western country, he left his mother and younger brother and sister in the provincial town of Kompong Cham and headed off for Thailand with an uncle and his family in 1979, soon after Pol Pot was toppled. He lived in a refugee camp for eighteen months, working as medical assistant to the Red Cross team in the camp. He did not go to school there as it was below his level.

He arrived in Australia in October 1980, sponsored by a relative already in Sydney. His age was augmented by two years (to twenty-three) as the relative did not know his exact age.

He had "hardly any" English when he arrived in Australia and immediately enrolled to do an English course with adults for ten weeks at Cabramatta Hostel. When the course finished he was on the streets for a while not knowing what to do next, work or study. Then he was told of an English course at N.S.W. University which catered for students who intended to do further education. The course was for three months and he did it in 1981. He was out in the cold for a while and was on unemployment benefits for a few months, before he was accepted to do matriculation at Sydney Technical School in 1982, which he completed successfully.

Money, then, became a problem as he intended to do a Computer Science course at the then N.S.W. Institute of Technology. He took 1983 off to work and saved some money and started the course in 1984. He finished the course four years later, in 1987, gaining a degree from the University of Technology, Sydney (UTS).

Throughout his study in Australia he had "no problems, except financial ones". Here is another example of how a solid education in Khmer helped to enhance education in English.

He is now working as a computer programmer in Sydney and is sending money regularly to his mother, brother and sister in Cambodia. He is yearning to visit them.

EMPLOYMENT

Only five of my sample of 30 are in the labour force - i.e. they have left school or have finished their education and are working or in search for work. They are:

1. A twenty-nine year-old male who completed his computer science course last year and is now working as a computer programmer. He has been here for eight years. (Interviewee 6)

2. A twenty year-old female who left school over three years ago at the end of Year 8, after she had been in Australia for two years. Since then she has been working as a machinist and is now married with one child. (Interviewee 28)

3. A twenty-two year-old female who decided not to continue her studies after she unsuccessfully finished a TAFE course in 1986, when she had been here for one year. She is now working as a rag cutter for St Vincent de Paul. (Interviewee 25)

4. A seventeen year-old female who left school last year, at the end of Year 11 after having been here for six years. When I spoke to her (in March) she was doing a three-month clerical training course with the Commonwealth Employment Services. She was hoping to get a job as a clerical assistant when she finished, or to do child care training at Bankstown College of TAFE. (Interviewee 15)

5. A twenty-one year-old male who left school last year, at the end of Year 11, after having been here for four years. He works as a marble cutter for the local factory and is hoping to return to Technical School to learn mechanics. (Interviewee 11)

The main reason for the last four persons' discontinuing their studies was their inability to cope academically. Financial, family and school problems are mentioned by one interviewee only.

While there is no foreseeable problem for the first person, as he possesses a highly marketable skill, the situation for the other four is far from satisfactory. It is true that three of them are employed but they do not have any particular skill. Their chance of getting a better job is very slim given their situation, unless some sort of work training is made available to them.

All four of them want to do further work training, such as mechanics, child care and hair-dressing. Since they left school only two (second and fourth persons) have received further training: a CES clerical course for three months, and sewing at a Technical College for six months. They received unemployment benefits and AUSTUDY while they did these courses.

Except for the computer programmer (the first person) who found his job through advertisement and "rang the head of the department and asked for an interview", the other three found their jobs through friends and relatives who worked there or "just followed everybody else."

Only one of them (the third person) had ever been out of work for a lengthy period, and was on unemployment benefits for one year before she found her first job; the others seem to have been able to find work easily enough.

A possible reason why it was harder for the third person to find a job was that she, at the time, had not been in Australia for very long (one year) and therefore had not made the necessary contacts or learnt the art of job-seeking.

School leavers who have been in Australia for a few years have found it easier to find a job than those who want to join the work force on arrival. This is because, firstly, the former group speak better English; and secondly, their time in Australia has allowed them to learn about the labour market and to make the necessary contacts that lead to employment.

They all like their jobs. However, except for the first person who thinks that his future prospects look good and that he'll 'stick to it', the other three do not think that they will have a good future with their present job and are looking for better ones. They are doing now whatever is available to save the money to build a house or get married.

The Overall Situation

As we know, over a quarter of the Cambodian population in NSW is in the 15-24 age group. Most of the school-age adolescents are still at school, and few older ones are attending tertiary institutions or are doing work training courses of some sort. When they finish their courses or leave school either at the end of year 12 or earlier, they will fall into one of these four categories:

1. Those who successfully complete their tertiary or work training courses and look for employment.

2. Those who successfully pass HSC and will continue with their tertiary education.

3. Those who discontinue their schooling after HSC or before for employment - usually unskilled work.

4. Those who discontinue their schooling after HSC or before to join the unemployed, unskilled workforce.

As long as racial prejudice does not interfere with their employment opportunities, and their skill is marketable at a given time, there does not seem to be any problem associated with those in the first category. The situation is not so urgent for the second category as they will spend some years in tertiary institutions.

Most Cambodian adolescents, however, will fall into the third and fourth categories - i.e. they are employed in unskilled jobs or are unskilled and unemployed. Given that they are still very young, it is sad that they'll spend the rest of their lives being unable to contribute fully to Australian society. It is very important, therefore, that some sort of work training programs be made available for these school leavers to acquire some sort of trade or skill which will give them wider prospects in the labour market.

TABLE B: Schooling

Interviewees	Time spent learning English in Australia	Level of Education Reached	Difficult Subjects
1	None. Started part-time Year 11 at Sydney Tech	3rd year Bachelor of Science	English
2	Started at Primary School	Year 12	Chemistry English Economics
3	Two months at I.L.U.	3rd year Medical Course	English
4	One and a half years at I.L.U.	Wilkins I.L.U.	Science Geography English
5	One year at I.L.U.	Year 11	English Chemistry
6	Six months at N.S.W. University and with Adult Migrant Education	Completed Computer Science Course in 1987	No problem
7	One and a half years at I.L.U.	Year 12	Everything
8	One and a half years at I.L.U.	Year 11	English Physics
9	Three terms at I.L.U.	I.L.U.	Social Science
10	One year at I.L.U.	I.L.U.	English Maths Science
11	Two years at I.L.U.	Left school at the end of Year 11 in 1987. Now is a marble cutter.	English Maths
12	Started at Primary School	Year 9	English
13	Started at Primary School	1st year Bachelor of Science	English Physics
14	Started at Primary School	Year 12	Physics Chemistry English
15	Started at Primary School	Left school at the end of Year 11 in 1987. Now doing clerical training with C.E.S.	Economics Maths Geography
16	One and a half years at I.L.U.	Year 10	Everything
17	Started at Primary School	Year 10	English Maths
18	Started at Primary School	Year 10	Maths English
19	Started at Primary School	Year 9	Japanese Commerce

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20	One and a half years at I.L.U.	Year 12	English Chemistry Biology Ancient History
21	One year at I.L.U.	Year 11	Japanese
22	Started at Primary School	Year 7	Science
23	Three terms at I.L.U.	Year 12	Chemistry English Maths
24	One year at I.L.U.	Year 10	Science Maths Geography
25	Three months (with adult Migrant Education)	Left Bankstown TAFE. Now is a rag cutter	Science English
26	One and a half years at I.L.U.	Year 10	Science English
27	One and a half years at I.L.U.	Year 12	English
28	One and a half years at I.L.U.	Left school at the end of year 8. Now is a machinist.	Maths Science
29	Started at Primary School	Year 11	No
30	Started at Primary School	Year 10	Maths

CONCLUSION

The Cambodian social fabric was turned upside down as a result of western colonisation, domination and intervention, followed by a national radical revolution that took place between 1975 and 1979. When Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge were routed in 1979 by the Vietnamese, much of Cambodia was on the brink of starvation. This was the final trigger. Cambodians left their country in numbers never seen before in history as their farmlands were bombed out, their families broken down and their homes destroyed. Under a humanitarian banner hundreds of thousands of Cambodians have resettled in the western countries in the 1980s. Australia accepted its share of international responsibility and has allowed over 13,000 (according to the 1986 census) Cambodians to build their new life here.

In N.S.W., for example, there are about 6,000 Cambodians. Their settlement, if evaluated in terms of employment, has been rather unsuccessful. Their unemployment rate of 35.71 per cent (according to the 1986 census) is one of the highest among all the ethnic groups in N.S.W. This is due to the fact that many of them are uneducated and came from a peasant background which is not conducive to successful resettlement in the Australian industrial society.

Over a quarter of the Cambodian population in Australia are adolescents, aged between 15 and 24. They are first generation, young, new Australians on whom their parents and community look as vehicles of social mobility. My study has found, however, that it is not going to be easy. Only a select group has managed to succeed educationally. Among other things their success depends on their educational background, motivation, family support and expectations.

It must be noted, however, that the general lack of achievement in education of Cambodian adolescents is not unique. The phenomenon is in fact quite widespread among non-English speaking young immigrants. Cambodian adolescents, however, possess a unique history in their home land prior to their departure. The traumatic experiences they went through before they left Cambodia, especially during the Pol Pot time, accentuates this problem.

My survey found that among the 30 adolescents who arrived in Australia when they were between ten and twenty-one years old, only ten are now literate in Khmer. The other twenty are illiterate or semi-literate in their mother-tongue. This must have great implications for their educational achievement or lack of it in Australia.

The education of all Cambodian adolescents was disrupted for at least four years (the Pol Pot period), and my interviewees' experiences were no exception. The abolition of schooling between 1975 and 1979 meant that some adolescents did not even have the opportunity to begin an education in Cambodia. This disruption of schooling has resulted in some adolescents being illiterate or semi-literate in Khmer when they arrived in Australia. It has also resulted in adolescents having low-level conceptual development as they have missed out on many basic concepts that children normally acquire at primary and junior level secondary schooling. This means that Cambodian adolescents have a lot of catching up work to do. Sometimes, it prevents or delays them from acquiring further, deeper concepts.

Illiteracy in Khmer also seems to slow down their acquisition of English. Out of the twenty interviewees who are illiterate or semi-literate in Khmer only two or three are said to be doing quite well at school. The rest are struggling along, citing English together with other subjects as their main problem at school. Among the ten interviewees who are literate in Khmer, three are attending university courses, one has finished a university course while the other six are also struggling at secondary level.

It seems that among those who are illiterate or semi-literate in Khmer, there is a better chance of success for those who arrived in Australia at a younger age, i.e. around ten years old or less, than for those who arrived older.

While it is possible for those who are literate in Khmer to excel in their education in a short time (interviewees 1, 3, 6 and 13) there is virtually no such possibility for those who are illiterate or semi-literate in Khmer. Among the later group only those who arrived in Australia at a young age have the time to start and catch up with the new concepts, and therefore reach senior secondary level with confidence (interviewees 2, 8 and 14).

The adolescents' inability to master the English language while at high school or during secondary education has had profound effects. The low language ceiling and the limited vocabulary they possess means that they had limited ability to put into words the various concepts. This inability to communicate at more than a basic level limited their thinking process and hindered their social and educational development. Very few adolescents managed to break that language ceiling and excel while at school. It seems that those who were literate in Khmer and had received a substantial education in Khmer were able to do

that more often than those who were illiterate in Khmer and did not receive much education in Khmer before their arrival in Australia.

My study has also found that in N.S.W. there has been no systematic program to maintain adolescents' knowledge of Khmer. As a result, even though only three of the interviewees missed out altogether on their education in Cambodia and Thailand, at the time of interview I found that seven of them were illiterate. This regression means that the adolescents' ability to communicate in Khmer had diminished. I observed that some of my sample and other adolescents in the Cambodian community had difficulties in communicating with their parents. In some families, except for the everyday household exchanges, there was hardly any in-depth conversation as there is no language provision for such discussion. As the range of home language became smaller and smaller, parents were unable to pass on their values and cultural heritage. Lack of proficiency in Khmer, therefore, means that the adolescents can not understand their parents' culture. They find themselves trapped between the two cultures as their lack of English makes access to Australian culture difficult. This means that they are unable to identify with any cultural group. This difficulty is usually unperceived by the parents but it results in a serious lack of understanding which frequently creates friction or tensions in the family.

These adolescents are unable to identify even with their parents whom they perceive as belonging to another culture while they themselves are pulled towards the mainstream Australian culture.

Without systematic reinforcement to maintain these adolescents' knowledge of Khmer language and culture they will never be able to confidently accept a new culture. Lack of confidence and self-identification leads to insecurity and inability to cope socially. I observed the tensions and signs of the beginning of these social problems.

Given the importance of literacy in Khmer for general education and acculturation it is to be hoped that more can be done to maintain and improve their literacy in Khmer and reinforce their cultural heritage. Perhaps it would not be inappropriate to give Cambodian adolescents a few years of general education in Khmer as this would expand their linguistic ability and build up their confidence. A surer knowledge of their own language and culture would improve their educational prospects generally.

As far as employment for these adolescents is concerned, there is ground for concern. Most of the school age adolescents are still studying but they will be soon joining the workforce. Having followed their trail of education, I think that only a few will be able to

successfully begin and complete tertiary or higher education, while the majority will leave school armed with very few skills because of their inability to master the English language.

While many have not found it difficult to find an unskilled job, provided that they have built up the right contacts, it is going to be very difficult for them to move away from such jobs if opportunities for work training are not easy to come by. This means that the forthcoming Cambodian generation will not be able to contribute to Australia to their full potential. This will also be a great disappointment to their parents.

My research found that adolescents who arrived here recently have more difficulty in finding jobs than those who have been here for several years. This is because the latter group had built up contact and spoke more English as a result of having been here longer.

Skills seem to be the stumbling block for employment. It is hoped that more work training type courses will become available for those who intend to join the workforce whether they have been here for a long time or not.

Because of the nature and reasons for their migration, I have come upon many cases of lone adolescents - adolescents who have no close relatives, no guardians in Australia to look after them. These lone adolescents have had to battle through life on their own without much financial or emotional support. Their future depended very much on their individual determination. It is hoped that more can be done to provide them with some sort of support system that they can turn to when in need.

During my research I did not encounter any adolescent with serious social problems. There are, of course, some adolescents who dress or behave in a way considered socially unsuitable in the eyes of Cambodian elders. However, there has been very little serious delinquent behaviour and very few adolescents who roam the street aimlessly.

Their settlement on a whole has been a success even though not many excel with their education or win high places. It seems that the Cambodian community will have to wait for a while, i.e. for those who arrived here at a young age (ten years old or younger), to witness the social mobility of their members. Even then, having come from a working-class background, their achievement will be limited as the competition will be very fierce indeed for them.

re are about 250,000 Cambodian refugees living along the Thai-Cambodian
of them are under the control of the three political factions which oppose the
acked Heng Samrin government in Phnom Penh. These refugees have been
ıps for many years, some as long as ten years or more. They live on
nternational agencies behind barbed wire and are banned from earning a
land. When I visited one of these camps in 1987, I met many children; the
vere born and brought up in the camp. They have been living in such an
ironment that many of them don't even know what a banana or a mango tree

e refugees are seeking a new home. Given the reasonable success of their
ustralia should help and can help to take them away from the plight they are
should be given soon as the longer they stay in the camps the more difficult
them to resettle in Australia. The sooner those children and adolescents
r education and are allowed to live a normal life, the better.

Australia can help the refugees is to be actively involved in seeking a
ıtion for Cambodia, along the lines that former Foreign Minister, Bill
his counterpart from Indonesia have initiated in the last few years. During
ıe camp, dozens of refugees told me of their preference to return to their
'ambodia, to be reunited with their friends and relatives. This can only
a political solution is found.

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